

"Great Events"

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ERRATA.—In the first article of the last Number, eighth line from the caption, for “*cite*,” read “*can cite*.” In a part of the impression, also, at page 194, third line from bottom, the ill-sounding word “*shew*” escaped notice.

## MR. BURRITT, THE CELEBRATED LINGUIST.

[MR. BURRITT,—whose letter, containing some account of himself and of his course of study, will be found below,—is the same individual, referred to in the speech of GOVERNOR EVERETT, delivered at the Common School Convention in Taunton, in 1838. That admirable speech was published, in the 14th No. page 219, of the first Volume of this Journal.

It is matter for wonder, that the fertile imagination of the ancients did not conceive of a god, in whom to embody the attribute, or quality, of *Perseverance*; and, in whose name, to erect altars and temples in honor of that virtue. The world is full both of positive and negative proofs of its power;—of proofs, that almost any thing can be accomplished by it, and that almost nothing, of any value, can be accomplished without it. Some persons have a foolish affectation of being independent of mental labor; of making great intellectual achievements, by a sort of inspiration; and they assume airs of disdain towards laborious, pains-taking, persevering industry. These are the *sophomores* in literature and science; and, whether in college or out of it, they are only *wise fools*. It is altogether more true, and indicates a far higher grade of mind, to say with Mr. Burritt, in the following letter,—“*All that I have accomplished, or expect or hope to accomplish, has been and will be, by that patient, plodding, persevering process of accretion, which builds up ant-heaps, particle by particle, thought by thought, and fact by fact.*”

One of the finest passages in Shakspeare begins thus:—

“*Persev'erance, dear, my lord,  
Keeps honor bright. To have done, is to hang,  
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail,  
In monumental mockery.*”

\* \* \* \* \*

“*O, let not virtue seek  
Remuneration for the thing it was.*”

These are the sentiments to be imbibed by the emulous youth.—ED.]

## THE LEARNED BLACKSMITH.

“WE invite the attention of the public,” says the ‘Southern Literary Messenger,’ “to the subjoined communication from Dr. Nelson, of this city, accompanied by a letter to him from Mr. Burritt, already distinguished, by Governor Everett, as the learned blacksmith of Massachusetts. Mr. Burritt’s extraordinary acquirements, under the peculiar circumstances of his life, are only equalled by the modesty with which he shrinks from notoriety. We doubt whether there is a parallel instance, on record, of the same application to mental improvement, under such striking disadvantages. The most learned linguist, now living, we believe, is Mezzolanti, the Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Bologna, in Italy.

He is said to speak and write, fluently, eighteen ancient and modern languages, and twenty-two different dialects of Europe ; but Mezzolanti has not been obliged to labor, one third of his time, at the anvil for subsistence. Lord Byron said of him, "he is a monster of languages ; the Briareus of parts of speech ; a walking polyglot ; and one who ought to have existed at the time of the tower of Babel, as universal interpreter." What would Lord Byron have said of the self-taught Massachusetts linguist, whose wonderful acquisitions have been treasured up amidst toil and poverty, and in those intervals which are usually devoted to repose or recreation ? If any of our readers should be incredulous, in this matter, we need only refer them to the address of Governor Everett, and also to the personal testimony and observation of Dr. Nelson, of whom it may be said, that no declaration of ours is necessary to entitle his statements to the fullest confidence."

"**To the Editor :** With a few friends who have seen the following communication, I entirely concur in the opinion that it ought to be given to the public. It is a brilliant and unsurpassed example of what may be achieved by persevering application to study. To all persons, especially to the young mechanics of our country, it may prove a beacon of light, to guide them to higher destinies, by a diligent improvement of their 'little fragments of time.'

"Of the veracity of the statement made by the writer, there cannot be a doubt. In the Summer of 1838, Governor Everett, of Massachusetts, in an address to an association of mechanics in Boston, took occasion to mention that a blacksmith of that State had, by his unaided industry, made himself acquainted with *fifty languages*. In July, of the following year, I was passing through Worcester, the place of his present residence, and gratified my curiosity by calling to see him. Like any other son of Vulcan, Mr. Burritt was at his anvil. I introduced myself to him, observing that I had read, with great pleasure and unfeigned astonishment, an account of him, by the Governor of his State, which had induced me to take the liberty of paying him a visit. He very modestly replied, that the Governor had done him more than justice. It was true, he said, that he could read about fifty languages, but he had not studied them all, critically. Yankee curiosity had induced him to look at the Latin grammar ; he became interested in it, persevered, and finally acquired a thorough knowledge of that language. He then studied the Greek, with equal care. A perfect acquaintance with these languages had enabled him to read with facility the Italian, the French, the Spanish, and Portuguese. The Russian, to which he was devoting his 'odd moments,' he said, was the most difficult he had undertaken.

"I expressed my surprise at his youthful appearance. He informed me, that he was but *twenty-seven years of age* ; (to which statement I gave ready credence;) that he had been constantly engaged at his trade, from boyhood to that hour ; and that his education, previous to his apprenticeship, had been very slender.

"Mr. Burritt removed from a village near Hartford, in Connecticut, where he was born and where he learned his trade, to Worcester, to enjoy the benefit of an antiquarian library, stored with rare books, to which the trustees gave him daily access. 'Yes, sir,' said he, 'I now have the key to that library, (showing it, as if it were the most precious jewel, the real key to knowledge,) and there I go, every day, and study, eight hours ; I work, eight hours ; and the other eight I am obliged to devote to animal comfort and repose.'

"The stage drove up, and I most reluctantly left him, exacting, however, a promise that he would write me some account of himself,—of his past and present studies.

"The following is the first but not the only letter, which he has done me

the favor to write. I have assurance that Mr. Burritt would not be so false to his professions, as to object to its publicity. But I am equally well assured that it will give him more pain than pleasure. TH. NELSON.

"Richmond, Feb. 4th, 1840."

"Worcester, Dec. 16, 1839.

"DEAR SIR:—I sit down to write to you, under a lively apprehension that you will accept of no apology that I can make for my silence. But, before you impute to me indifference or neglect, I beg you, my dear sir, to consider the peculiar nature of my occupations, to reflect, that my time is not at my disposal, and that my leisure moments are such as I can steal away from the hours which my arduous manual labors would incline me to allow to repose.

"I deferred writing, some time, thinking to address you a letter on your return from the Springs; but the nature of my business became such, in the Fall, that I was compelled to labor both night and day, up to the present time, which is the first leisure hour that I have had for several months. I cannot but be gratefully affected by the benevolent interest which you manifested in my pursuits, both in our interview in Worcester, and in the letter for which I am indebted to your courtesy and kind consideration. I thank you, most cordially, for those expressions of good will. They are peculiarly gratifying, coming as they do from one whose personal acquaintance I have not had the means and pleasure of enjoying; a fact which proves, I fear, that I have been thrust before the world, very immaturely. An accidental allusion to my history and pursuits, which I made, unthinkingly, to a friend, was, to my surprise, brought before the public as a rather ostentatious *debut* to the world; and I find myself involved in a species of notoriety, not at all in consonance with my feelings. Those who have been acquainted with my character, from my youth up, will give me credit for my sincerity, when I say, that it never entered my heart to blazon forth any acquisition of my own. I had, until the unfortunate *denouement* which I have mentioned, pursued the even tenor of my way, unnoticed, even among my brethren and kindred. None of them ever thought that I had any particular *genius*, as it is called; I never thought so, myself. All that I have accomplished, or expect or hope to accomplish, has been and will be, by that plodding, patient, persevering process of accretion, which builds up ant-heaps, particle by particle, thought by thought, fact by fact. And, if ever I was actuated by ambition, its highest and furthest aspiration reached no further, than the hope to set before the young men of my country an example, in employing those invaluable fragments of time, called 'odd moments.' And, sir, I should esteem it an honor of costlier *water* than the tiara encircling a monarch's brow, if my future activity and attainments should encourage American *workingmen* to be proud and jealous of the credentials which God has given them to every eminence and immunity in the empire of mind. These are views and sentiments with which I have set down, night by night, for years, with blistered hand and brightening hope, to studies which I hoped might be serviceable to that class of community to which I am proud to belong. This is my *ambition*. This is the goal of my aspiration. But, not only the *prize*, but the whole *course*, lies before me, perhaps beyond my reach. 'I count myself not yet to have attained' to any thing worthy of public notice or private mention; what I *may do* is for Providence to determine.

"As you expressed a desire, in your letter, for some account of my past and present pursuits, I shall hope to gratify you on this point, and also rectify a misapprehension which you and many others may have entertained of my acquirements. With regard to my attention to the languages, (a study which I am not so fond of as mathematics,) I have tried, by a kind of practical and philosophical process, to contract such familiar acquaintance

ance with the head of a family of languages, as to introduce me to the other members of the same family. Thus, studying the Hebrew very critically, I became readily acquainted with its cognate languages, among the principal of which are the Syriac, Chaldaic, Arabic, Samaritan, Ethiopic, &c. The language of Europe occupied my attention immediately after I had finished my classics ; and I studied French, Spanish, Italian, and German, under native teachers. Afterwards, I pursued the Portuguese, Flemish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Welsh, Gælic, Celtic. I then ventured on, further east, into the Russian empire ; and the Sclavonic opened to me about a dozen of the languages spoken in that vast domain, between which the affinity is as marked as that between the Spanish and Portuguese. Besides these, I have attended to many different European dialects, still in vogue. I am now trying to push on, eastward, as my means will permit, hoping to discover still further analogies among the Oriental languages, which will assist my progress. I must now close this hasty though long letter, with the assurances of my most sincere respect and esteem.

“ ELIHU BURRITT.

“ To TH. NELSON, M. D.

“ N. B.—Please make my compliments acceptable to the ladies who were in your company, when at Worcester. I should be much pleased to send them some trivial token of my remembrance and respect.”

“ It was always his favorite tenet, (Sir W. Scott’s,) in contradiction to what he called the cant of sonneteers, that there is no necessary connexion between genius and an aversion or contempt for any of the common duties of life ; he thought, on the contrary, that to spend some fair portion of every day, in any matter-of-fact occupation, is good for the higher faculties themselves in the upshot.” —*Lockhart’s Life of Scott.*

#### HUMAN POWERS.

NO. II.

Not only a harmless, but a beneficial, variety characterizes all the works of God. One star differeth from another, in size and substance, as well as in glory. Earth’s surface is nowhere extensively uniform, except where it is barren and desolate. The members of each species of animal and vegetable life are as sure to vary, as the different species, from each other.

Man does not appear to be exempted from this general law of Heaven, but, every where, to be unequivocally marked with individuality ; and seems as much so, in his moral and intellectual, as in his physical, nature. His soul or his heart appears to have as many peculiarities as his countenance. All may be equally pure, but the manifestations of that purity will be different ; all may be equally wise, yet their wisdom will be variously displayed ; all may have taste and skill, and may innocently use them in very different departments and for very different purposes.

It is the duty of all to aim at perfection. It is the only standard for man. But there is no chemical combination of either animal matter, feeling, or mind, yet known, which will make either of those substances faultless ; nor have the three ever been so united and cultivated, as to exhibit no deviations from rectitude. The best human beings vary from each other ; this, the humblest will discover ; but how far each may vary from perfectibility, is known only to God.

Man may estimate, and has a perfect right to estimate, the moral and intellectual state of individuals or multitudes, provided he properly prepares himself for judging ; and each individual and community have an equal right to appeal from an unfavorable verdict of their peers, to their own conscience

and their God. And the only way to approximate towards a salutary harmony between these clashing thoughts and feelings, these conflicting judgments, is to enlighten those who are to think, and feel, and judge ; to substitute the laws of Nature for those of prejudice ; the laws of God for the errors of man.

He who would rightly aid in bringing the young to that position in society, where they would be likely to enjoy and serve themselves best, and to benefit others most, must endeavor to find out their natural propensities,—those bonds, which Nature has wound around the soul, the heart, and the senses,—and judiciously to use them. This should be the first work of every instructor. After he has a knowledge of the powers of the whole man, he may discipline them, if necessary ; he may turn them, as the rivers of water are turned, but cannot any more destroy them or turn them backward, than he can those waters. He may make them worse than useless ; but, while life remains, they will operate.

Those who would, then, build up society, in the widest extent of that term, must not go into the great field of humanity to make all alike, but to make them virtuous, useful, and happy ; to discover their talents, and then to turn them to the best account, in promoting their own happiness and the happiness of others. They must not expect to make all think alike, but be contented, if they can make them think actively, with pure desires to become right. They must not expect to make all profoundly learned, but must endeavor, that they should be truly wise. They should not strive so hard to make them believe this or that, as to purify the soul and heart, and store the mind well, and then to set them in search of truth. They should teach them to respect the opinions of the wise, but not to adopt them without reflection ; and, most particularly, not to reject them without a solemn conviction, after thorough examination, that they are incorrect.

Many speak of self-love, of pride, of ambition, the desire of wealth, or of physical, moral, and intellectual, superiority, as feelings, to be entirely annihilated ; and of disinterested benevolence, of performing all acts without any reference to a reward, merely because they are good, in themselves, as though all others were destitute of merit, and as though they ought to occupy the whole of life. They talk loudly of the love of neighbors and the love of God ; forgetting, that self-love is left us, as the standard of our love to others, and that this second is equally important with the first commandment ; forgetting, that what they would exterminate was placed in us by our Heavenly Father, to be felt and used ; and that it is only when it becomes a disproportional part of our moral nature, that it is vice ; and that this wrong proportion may be too small as well as too great. Though the truly good often act without any regard to rewards, yet, God has put a life of disinterested benevolence out of the power of man. He has seen fit, therefore, to reward every good thought, word, or deed, in ways, which we, unless very stupid, cannot fail of understanding. The monitor in our breasts, conscience, will not forget its approving thrill, though every other paymaster, but He, who gave us that, should become bankrupt. The tree of moral life and duty is of so complicated a nature, that it is only from its fruit that it is safe to judge. It is safer for us to taste of that fruit, and then look backward, and see what has produced it, than to theorize on the questions, how water, earth, heat, light, and air, may be so combined, as to produce a perfect tree, and of course perfect fruit. The moral nerves of some are so sensitive, that they always take the latter course ; are always preparing a perfect soil and raising a perfect tree ; and of course live a life of disappointment,—as no perfect fruit is to be gathered, this side of heaven. They hang out, on the outer wall of refined thought and feeling, the banner of some abstract truth, in opposition to all experience. They prefer to walk over perdition on the finest wire of some startling theory, with all the thousand hazards of losing their balance, to any ease or safety they

might obtain by a circuitous route, though that circuitous route might bring them sooner, as well as safer, to their object. Some are so sure that all are born equal, that they would not believe the scales that made a difference in their weight, much less the measure that should make a variance between the heads or hearts of any two, at the hour of their birth. Some are so certain that the sexes are equal, that they would be highly offended, if the music-master should gravely declare, that ladies could not sing bass as well as gentlemen ; or at the declaration, that gentlemen could not nurse children as well as ladies. Some are so opposed to all resistance of evil, that they would not protect their mothers, wives, and daughters, from the rudest violence. No such theorists should have any thing to do with education ; they have not learned the alphabet in any useful philosophy. No tree of their raising will ever bear any but the most insipid fruit. We would have all the varied human powers of both sexes harmonize, like the sounds which arise from a well-regulated orchestra ; and this we would have take place, not only in the individual and family, but throughout the widest ranges of society. And as those, who cause the delightful harmony which ascends from that orchestra, have only arrived at their surprising accuracy, by a strict discipline of their, in some degree, peculiar faculties ; how can we hope for the general harmony of society, till each shall take his proper position, and learn and well perform his appropriate part ; till society shall call for all the varied powers of man ; and till each shall study his own capabilities, and improve and discipline them, or shall have those duties done at a proper season, by others ? It is the duty of social man to cherish, bring out, and keep correct, every faculty of the human soul ; to purify and elevate every feeling of the human heart, and to cultivate all the latent powers of skill and taste. For it would be a libel upon the Creator, to say, that he had given a redundancy of powers to his intelligent offspring ; it would be as absurd as to say, that he had given us too many senses ; or, had decorated the human frame with too many members. The portals to the wide temple of human usefulness, and consequent happiness, are sufficiently numerous and broad, to admit all, if they will but enter them, agreeably to the will of Providence. It is ignorance, vice, folly, prejudice, selfishness, and their numerous corrupt allies, that so lessen the number of those portals and so narrow those which remain, that but few can enter them ; it is these, which drive so many from their proper spheres of action, which reduce so many to the necessity of climbing up some other way, of feebly sustaining an unnatural position in society ; it is such difficulties, too, which give the irresolute a specious pretext for remaining idle,—for saying that what they are best fitted by nature to do is not wanted, and they have not sufficient energy to act a part, for which they have no taste. Savages cultivate no arts but the destructive ; learn only to hunt, to fish, and to destroy an enemy ; they leave all that there is in man, excepting this energy to destroy, to sleep, till civilization reaches them, and awakens other and more ennobling energies.

God has been equally bountiful to all ; man has used or abused his benevolence according to the free counsel of his own will. His powers are created and then permitted to slumber, till his own exertions shall awake them. If man but goes deep enough, into his own mind, body, and heart, he will there find the susceptibility of every power, which now adorns or ever did adorn humanity ; and probably a host, which even imagination could not number, that have slept from his creation to the present moment ; and will sleep, till he more fully obeys the voice of Nature and of Nature's God. And those that now look green, and promise perennial fruit, will wither and slumber again in the same vault of human stupidity, if not faithfully watered by his hand. As lands neglected by the agriculturist soon become a forest, and, however rich they may be, cease to bring forth those productions which best sustain human life ; so all those

powers, which go to make up the intelligent, moral, and skilful, citizen, and the civilization and happiness of society, may be so long and so widely neglected, as to become an equally unproductive waste ; a mental, moral, and even a physical, desert ; and as the soil of that wilderness, however long neglected, retains all its original powers to minister to the wants and elevation of man, whenever he shall use the proper means to call them forth ; so the physical, moral and intellectual, energies of our race, by whatever circumstances they may have been depressed, or however long they may have slumbered, may resume all their powers of usefulness, and exercise all their means of promoting individual and social happiness, whenever those who have buried their talents shall resolve to disinter and use them, according to the will of Heaven, and shall faithfully carry those resolutions into effect.

S. P.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF STONEHAM.

"The return of our annual meeting has again brought your school committee before you, with their report ; and our first object will be, to review what has been done, during the past year, to advance the all-important cause of Common-School education. What have the teachers done ? What have the scholars done ? What have your committee done ? What have you yourselves done ? And what have we all left undone ?

"Now, although the teachers, taken together, have been as good, and the progress made by the scholars in acquiring knowledge as great, perhaps, as, taking all things into consideration, could have been expected ; yet, we must say, that we believe, if the parents, the superintending committee, the prudential committees, the teachers, and the scholars, had, all and each of us, done every thing possible, the amount of knowledge treasured up would have been at least double. In other words, we believe, that, if all persons who are, or ought to be, deeply interested in Common-School education, would take the subject into serious consideration, and would understandingly perform all their duties, in relation to it, our district schools might and would be improved, until the amount of knowledge diffused by them, with the same expense, would be twice as much as it now is. We censure no particular man, or class of men. All are faulty ; and, while we are very willing to bear our share of blame, for omissions of duty, we hope that all others will be willing to do likewise. \* \* \* \*

"The committee of 1838 recommended, that our scholars be so classified, as to place the large and small children in the charge of different teachers, —under such different rules and regulations, as their various ages and circumstances might require. With much pleasure, we perceive, that, by a recent vote of the town, this organization is to be carried into effect, to some extent, the ensuing year. We sincerely hope, that no sectional jealousies will be allowed to prevent a fair trial of this plan. Certain we are, that, if such a trial can be had, the results will be of great benefit to the children, and will satisfy every reasonable parent, in town. \* \* \* \*

"The committee of 1838 recommended the propriety and importance of appropriating a small sum of money, yearly, for the purchase of apparatus for the schools, and for furnishing each district with a library. We would again recommend these objects, particularly the latter one, to the serious consideration of every man, woman, and child, in Stoneham. All persons, who have had any experience in teaching children, (and we hope there is not a parent present, who has not taught his own children, more or less,) know the importance of having something, by which to demonstrate whatever they would teach. Suppose you take a child, who never saw an artificial globe, and attempt to give him a knowledge of it ;—would you do this by description, alone, or would you not rather show him a globe, and then

describe its construction, and the uses of its various parts ? Doubtless, you will all say, the latter method would be preferable. Then, why not instruct your children by it ? Probably, you will say, that your greatest objection is the expense of the instruments. And what would this alarming expense be ? An apparatus, sufficient for demonstrating the studies in our schools, if purchased by the town, might cost a rich man a dollar, (the price of a ticket to the play.) Well, you will say, such a one can pay without any inconvenience ; but a poor man, one who has a large family, and supports them by daily labor,—he cannot pay, without taking the bread out of the mouths of his children. Now, what would this cost a poor man ? Possibly, a ninepence ; (the price of a pound of smoking tobacco;) so that, instead of taking the bread out of his children's mouths, it would, at the worst, be but taking the pipe out of his own mouth. Your committee believe, that this usual objection, "the expense of the thing," is not the reason why our schools are not furnished with this indispensable requisite. We think the true cause is this. Most parents have never examined the subject, in a proper manner ; have never informed themselves of its importance ; and, of course, are not aware of its beneficial results. To such, we would suggest an experiment. When you return home, let each one take a small child, (if you have none of your own, your neighbor's will answer, equally well,) and give him a minute description of some object, which he never saw ; then show him another object, of which he is equally ignorant ; let him see and handle it, and, at the same time, receive a description from you ; then question him about these two objects, and we think you will find, he has received a better knowledge of the one he has seen, in five minutes, than you can give him of the other, by mere description, in five hours. Try these experiments, until you are perfectly satisfied ; and, if you come to the conclusion which we think you must, you will then be ready and willing to vote an appropriation of money to furnish your schools with all necessary apparatus.

" Important as this subject appears to us, we consider the district library much more important. All children, who have a common share of intellect, and who have learned to read, will, to some considerable extent, employ their leisure hours in reading such books as are put within their reach. We presume no person will deny the truth of this assertion ; and if, occasionally, a child is found, who seems to have no inclination to read, depend upon it, this is a consequence of not furnishing him with books, of a proper kind, at a proper time, with which he would have cultivated a taste for reading. The argument, then, stands thus. Children must and will read, and generally, they will read such books as are thrown in their way. If they cannot obtain good ones, they will read bad ones. Now, what is the duty of parents ? to let their children read all the trashy, vicious works they may chance to meet with, or to furnish them with a library of choice books, such as no person, young or old, can peruse, without becoming wiser and better ? We think you will all say, it is our duty to furnish the library of good books. Then, why do you not do it ? Here comes the old excuse : " The expense ; we cannot afford it, particularly in these hard times." Your committee do not believe a word of this " cannot afford it business." There is not a man to be found, but who can afford to spend a small sum of money, occasionally, in any manner he pleases. And can he spend it for any better purpose than this ? Let any man look at this " cannot afford it," a few moments, with the good of his children in his mind, and this bugbear will vanish into thin air. Sacrifice your ticket to the theatre, your pound of tobacco, or some other frivolous amusement or indulgence, (if you cannot do this without,) and you will soon find all your districts supplied with libraries. \* \* \* \* \*

" We have a few words to say about our schoolrooms. The Report of 1838 stated, that districts No. 1, 4, and 5, had erected good schoolhouses.

To these we are happy to add one in No. 2, built during the past year. This house, in some respects, is better than any one previously built. It is larger, in proportion to the number of scholars belonging to the district. It is furnished with the means of ventilation. And, what is more wonderful still, it does not stand in the highway, but at such a respectable distance, as to furnish an ample playground for the children. In district No. 3, a tax was assessed, last Summer, to repair the present house or build a new one. \* \* \* District No. 6, have voted to raise money for the purpose of enlarging and repairing their house; and, probably before their summer school commences, they will be furnished with a house as good, at least, as any one in town. Thus, you see, there is reason to hope, that the committee of 1840 will be able to report, that this town is provided with a suitable number of schoolhouses, built and finished according to the liberality and improved methods of the present day. \* \* \*

"We think committees should exact from teachers, testimonials, not only of their acquired knowledge and good moral character, but also of their ability to communicate such knowledge, in a familiar, easy, and practical, manner. In the duty of selecting teachers, prudential committees perform a principal part; hence, these committees should consist of such men as are best able to judge of the proper qualifications of instructors. And they should always use all reasonable efforts to secure the services of the best teachers, and of none other. Indeed, all experience goes to prove, that the very best teachers are invariably the cheapest.

"We have dwelt at considerable length on these subjects, because we consider them of great importance. There is no other institution in our country, so essential to our happiness, so indispensable to the existence of a free people, as the Common-School system. Abolish this, and, in a short time, all our free institutions will follow; for it is an immutable truth, that a free republic cannot exist, where the common people are sunk in ignorance.

"Then cherish your Common Schools, as you would your own freedom and happiness; and rest assured, that the men, who would shut out knowledge from the laboring people, are the very men who would rule them with the iron rod of despotism.

"Thus we have, by confession, endeavored to atone, in some measure, for our sins of omission and commission. And now, allow us to ask all the parents, the masters, or guardians, of these school children, a few plain, and, as we think, important, questions. Have you, during the past year or years, done every thing in your power, (consistent with other duties,) to furnish for your children the greatest possible amount of schooling? Have you been careful to provide for them suitable schoolrooms, the best of teachers, and all necessary books, for pursuing their various studies? Have you sent them to school, regularly, and allowed them to be absent only when absolutely necessary? Have you frequently examined and taught them, yourselves? Have you taken care that your children should always obey the orders of their instructors? Have you encouraged your children and their teachers, by frequently visiting their schools, showing by your presence, and the interest you exhibit in their improvement, that you are alive to the cause of education, that you will judge of the capabilities of your teacher, and the progress made by your children, yourselves?

"If you have not done all this, and much more, then you have not done your whole duty; and if your children are not well educated, you alone are to blame.

"But, why have you not done your duty? Perhaps we shall hear the old excuse, "We cannot afford to do it." But, can you afford to let your child grow up ignorant, and, of course, vicious, until he becomes ruined, in character and morals? Can you afford this, we say? Will this cost you nothing? no money? no anguish of spirit, to which the loss of your last farthing would be a mere trifle?

"If you cannot afford these feelings, then do your duty like men. Give all your children a sound Common-School education, improved by a course of good reading and parental instruction; and, with the common blessings of Providence, they will grow up such men and such women, as you would wish to leave behind you, when your last day shall close."

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#### DEDICATION OF A SCHOOLHOUSE.

[A few years ago, a public announcement of the dedication of a *Barn* would have excited little more surprise than that of the dedication of a *Schoolhouse*. Lately, however, and in some districts, such a change has taken place, in public opinion, that the completion and opening of a Temple for Youth have been deemed worthy to be dignified and solemnized by services, partaking, in some degree, of a religious character. When the schoolhouse in Chelsea was opened, the Rev. Mr. Brooks,—the gentleman, so well known as the friend of the Common Schools,—attended, by invitation, and delivered an appropriate Address. Last year, the members of a school district, in Hanover, in Plymouth county, having erected a beautiful schoolhouse,—constructed, substantially, on the most approved plan,—invited the Rev. SAMUEL J. MAY to assist in commemorating the occasion, by the delivery of a suitable Address. The invitation was accepted. Knowing the enlarged ideas and excellent views, possessed by that gentleman, on the subject of education, we felt a strong desire to peruse the Address, in manuscript; and, having been indulged in this wish, we felt a still stronger one to present it to our readers,—which we have the pleasure of now doing. To this, we are led by two reasons: first, because of its intrinsic merits and value; and, secondly, because the service of a Dedicatory Address constitutes a new era in schoolhouse history. We have no doubt, that this example will be deemed a precedent, worthy to be followed in regard to some, at least, of the schoolhouses, which are erecting, this year. Hanover has given to the public an excellent model for a schoolhouse, and Mr. May another, for a commemorative Address.—ED.]

#### AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY REV. S. J. MAY, AT THE OPENING OF A NEW AND HIGHLY-IMPROVED DISTRICT SCHOOLHOUSE IN HANOVER, MASS. JUNE 20, 1839.

The dedication of a District Schoolhouse! Is it possible, some may say, that this large assembly have come together for no other purpose! Friends, let those smile who will, and attempt to deride us, if they please; this is an auspicious event. Improvement seldom stops where it begins. Its spirit is diffusive. Its first appearance, therefore, is a cause for hope, joy, thanksgiving. Could those, who witnessed the erection of the first schoolhouse ever built on earth, have foreseen the inestimable blessings which would flow from the education of the people, think you any expression of interest in that event would have been deemed extravagant? Oh no! Eloquence, Poetry, and Music, would have vied with each other, to celebrate it. Patriotism, Philanthropy, Religion, would have poured forth their most fervent acknowledgements to the Author of all good. No wise man ever contemns the beginning of improvement, however small.

Were our Common Schools valued, as they ought to be; were their importance duly appreciated; none would express surprise at our present meeting. This would be deemed worthy of public notice and rejoicing,—the erection of such a neat, spacious, well-arranged, thoroughly-built, and *ventilated*, schoolhouse; set apart, withal, from the public road, with ample grounds around it. This is an event, which will affect the wellbeing of the community. Not the inhabitants of this district, alone, are to be benefited by it. Not a schoolhouse will be hereafter built, in all this region,

but it shall be the better for your example. The good you have done will not be confined to yourselves. Its influence will extend itself,—and that continually. It may spread, in wider and wider circles, until it reaches far beyond our observation. There is need, every where, of just such improvements as you have introduced into this house. From my heart, I thank you, for this beginning of better things.

Who, that has given any intelligent attention to the operation of our system of Public Instruction, is not persuaded, that the small size, ill-arrangement, and foul air, of our schoolhouses, present serious obstacles to the health and growth of the bodies and minds of our children? Among the conditions, on which we may reasonably promise that children shall derive benefit from going to school, surely, this is one,—*that they be made comfortable, while there*; that is, that they be not crowded for room; be furnished with easy and convenient seats and desks; be kept in an agreeable temperature; and, more than all, that they be amply supplied with that necessary of life, **PURE AIR**. Now, it is notorious, this obvious condition, indispensable though it be, has very rarely been provided for. Go through our county,—ay, through our Commonwealth,—and you shall find not one schoolhouse in fifty, large enough to accommodate the number of children usually gathered within it; not one in five hundred, constructed with due, intelligent regard to the easy and proper posture of their bodies; not one in a thousand, in which there is any contrivance to keep them supplied with fresh air, suitably attempered by heat. Nor shall you, scarcely ever, be led to suspect, by the symmetry or neatness of the building, or by the choice of its location, that your fellow-citizens intended to make the school an inviting place. Most of the district schoolhouses, I am acquainted with, are about as agreeable to the eye as our pounds; and I fear they are not looked upon, by our children, with much more pleasure, than are those other dull enclosures, by our cattle.

I have no doubt, that the uneasiness and mutual interruption, to which children are subjected, in most of our schoolhouses, owing to their narrow dimensions, ill-construction, and want of ventilation, are among the principal causes of the ill-success of our system of Public Instruction. Not half the schoolrooms in Massachusetts, I venture to say, are more than twenty-two feet square; few of them are more than eight feet high. In these rooms, thirty, forty, fifty, and even sixty, youth, from four to sixteen years of age, are ordinarily brought together, and there confined, three hours of each half day, with intermissions of only five or ten minutes. Now, the air, embraced within the walls of rooms of such dimensions, would be exhausted of its life-giving ingredients, by the breathing of forty, in about a half hour. And, were it not for the fresh air, which presses in through cracks and crevices, suspension if not extinction of life would ensue. Because such disasters have not actually happened, we may not take it for granted, that the children have incurred no harm. Although they have made out to live upon the scanty supplies of air, which pressed in, around the window-sashes, under the door, and through the cracks in the floor and wainscot, perhaps without ever fainting away, they have often suffered lassitude, nausea, and headache, for the want of proper ventilation; or have taken colds, from the currents of air blowing upon them, from above, and beneath, and either side. Go, open the doors of these schoolhouses, in winter time, after the inmates have occupied them an hour, and you will need no arguments, I can adduce, to convince you, that such places are most unsuitable for beings, whose comfortable existence depends upon *pure air*.

Many children, I doubt not, have been sternly reprimanded, perhaps severely punished, for a listlessness and inattention, which were as involuntary as pain in the head, or sickness at the stomach. And many more have so habitually lost the vigor and elasticity of their minds, in consequence of

breathing the foul air of our schoolrooms, that they have gained the reputation of dullness, and have gone through life, dunces and drones. In 1832, it was said, by the Board of Censors of the American Institute of Instruction, "if we were called upon to name the most prominent defect in the schools of our country,—that which contributes most, directly and indirectly, to retard the progress of Public Education, and which most loudly calls for a prompt and thorough reform, it would be the want of spacious and convenient schoolhouses." Is there not reason, then, why we should rejoice, as we do, this day, most heartily, in the erection of such a schoolhouse as this? Brethren of this District: in behalf of your fellow-citizens, of the rising generation, and of the cause of good learning and virtue, I sincerely thank you, for what you have done. And allow me to add, I think myself happy, nay honored, in being called here to address you, on this occasion.

An event like this encourages the hope that the public interest in our Common Schools is reviving. That interest had become lamentably low. True, the importance of these schools has long been acknowledged; but it seems not to have been deeply felt. That the strength of our Republic, the efficiency and life of our civil institutions, reside in the intelligence and virtue of the people,—is a commonplace among us. Every body says so. But the sentiment has lost much of its vitality. By too many, it appears to be regarded, like the Declaration of Independence, rather as a rhetorical flourish, than as a sober, momentous truth. Else, a greater amount and a far better kind of instruction would have been, ere this day, provided for the whole people. That a good education cannot be acquired at our Common Schools is made manifest by this, alone,—that those, who are particularly anxious to have their children well instructed, even in the elementary branches of knowledge, send them to academies and private schools. Hence has arisen an evil, of momentous import in a community like ours. The public seminaries have fallen into disrepute. And the tendency is, to separate the people into classes and casts; the high and the low; the respectable and the vulgar. Now, the genius of our Republic, like the spirit of Christianity, would promote and preserve an equality among the people; not by depressing those who are exalted, but by lifting up those who are bowed down. The basis of our government is broadly laid on the equality of human rights. We repudiate the notion, that any one among us is born to ignorance, vice, inferiority. We profess to glory in the principle, that every one has, by birth, an equal right to life, liberty, knowledge, and the pursuit of happiness. It is incumbent upon us, then, in all consistency, to see to it, that, if possible, no individual shall grow up among us a stranger to true liberty, and the path to real happiness; that no one shall be compelled, by the poverty of his parents, to live in darkness and sin.

The whole community has an interest (a selfish interest, if I may so say) in the intellectual and moral development of every one of its members. Its own wellbeing may be seriously affected by the character of a single member. Blessed be God, He has made us mutually dependent. We cannot live to ourselves. Accurate knowledge, sound discretion, self-command, inflexible integrity, unfeigned piety, (let them be possessed by whom they may,) are an inestimable treasure to the community in which he dwells, no less than to the individual who has acquired them. And God only knows, in what minds there may be powers, in what hearts there may be affections, which, if unfolded, as they may be by a genial culture, would raise up new benefactors of our race. Not a few of the brightest lights of the intellectual and moral world have arisen from behind the clouds of poverty and parental ignorance. Doubtless, there have been very many, that have remained forever hid behind those clouds. Now, it is the specific office of our Common Schools, to dispel those clouds from every one; so that all may become as wise and as good as they are capable of being. And this is the office, which, more than any other, it behooves the community to see thoroughly well executed.

I am sure, no one, who has thought much upon this subject, will contradict me, when I say, that our Common Schools are the most important of all our seminaries of learning. Upon them, five sixths of the children of the Commonwealth depend entirely, for their education. It is customary, I know, to speak of academies and colleges, as if they were institutions of higher value; and public and private munificence have, in time past, been more freely bestowed upon them. But this is a very mistaken estimate. Our Common Schools are as much more important than our academies and colleges, as the education of five sixths of the people is more important to the common weal than the education of one sixth. Indeed, this is not all the difference. They are more important, in another point of view, that appears to me quite as much overlooked. They are *primary* schools. At them, many, who afterwards go to academies and colleges, receive the rudiments of their learning. And their subsequent progress depends, more than we are aware of, upon the commencement. The bias given to the young mind and heart affects them through life. In education, what is first in point of time is first, also, in importance. The care, culture, and example, of parents, transcend all other influences that ever operate upon the young; (would to God, that fathers and mothers did but realize how much the future welfare of their offspring depends upon them!) and, next to them, it depends upon the schools that children first attend.

Many youth, who afterwards spend years at academies and colleges, make little if any improvement, because of the errors that were committed in their primary instruction. Not only were they not well taught the elements of a common education,—to read well, spell well, and write well; but, what is more to be deplored, no love of learning was awakened, by those who gave the first direction to their thoughts. They were led to no conception of the delights of knowledge. The powers of their minds were rather repressed, than called into action. They were brought to regard school as a place of dull confinement, and study as a task. This was fatal to their mental growth. Many have gone through life, in ignorance and moral imbecility, owing to the neglect or bad management of their earliest instructors.

But it is chiefly because five sixths of the people depend wholly upon the Common Schools, for their literary instruction, that we should regard them as the most important of all our institutions of learning. If the community would show due respect to the dearest rights of all its members, and avail itself of all the intellectual and moral power, within its embrace, it must purify, and elevate, and quicken, our Common Schools. In them, there doubtless often are

“Hearts that are pregnant with celestial fire,  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.”

Every one of the children of men has a right to the assistance, which will enable him to develop the intellectual and moral faculties, God has given him, and to accomplish well the end of his being. To whatever extent it may be probable the process of education will be carried, in afterlife, it ought, in every case, to be begun *right*. Every child, however humble be his parentage, ought to be set out in that course, which (if his abilities and subsequent opportunities will permit him to pursue it) may lead him to the highest attainments in knowledge and virtue. Surely, this is not now done at our Common Schools. The moral culture of the young is scarcely attended to. It is often worse than neglected. They are permitted to corrupt one another. And even the expedients, ordinarily used to stimulate their minds, engender evil in their hearts. But, more than this, the elementary branches of learning are neither thoroughly nor properly taught. I appeal to yourselves. How few there are, of those who have been to no other schools, who can write their thoughts on any subject, even a letter of friendship, in accurate language, and in a consecutive order. Twice, in the course of my life, I have been the editor of papers, devoted to religion

and morality. Often have I received, from men and women, whose hearts longed to do good, communications, containing very valuable ideas, but so incoherently expressed, so ungrammatical, and so badly spelled, that I was obliged to re-write them, or throw them aside, as rubbish.

It is taken for granted, I suppose, that, if nothing more, the art of reading, at least, is well taught at our Common Schools. But I deny even this. Not many of those, who have had no other teaching, know how to derive from a book the pleasure and profit it might afford them. And sure am I, that there are few, who can read, *aloud*, in an intelligent, impressive, or agreeable manner. Some, who have enjoyed other advantages, and have been called into public life, have never been able to correct the bad habits which they had contracted in the beginning.

“To hear some parsons, when they preach  
How they run o'er all parts of speech,  
And neither rise a word, nor sink,—  
Our learned bishops, one would think,  
Had taken schoolboys from the rod,  
To make ambassadors to God.”

On this topic, I must omit more, that I intended to say. Let me only add, that I am confident the ability to read with intelligence is very much undervalued. Next in importance is it to high moral principles, and the spirit of piety. He, who possesses this power, may have access, thereby, to all the treasures of wisdom, in the language. He may hold communion with the most cultivated minds, and the most devout hearts. He may let into the recesses of his soul the brightest lights of the age.

It is because elementary instruction is more important than any other, because it is given at our Common Schools, and because five sixths of the people are educated in them, that these schools should be regarded, and provided for, as the most important of all our seminaries of learning. The kind and the amount of instruction to be obtained at them, now, is altogether less, than the people need, and ought to have. Owing to their defects, our academies and colleges are less useful than they might be. A large amount of money and an immense amount of time are thrown away, in the operation of our present system of Public Instruction. If our Common Schools were justly appreciated, and improved as they might be, our children would leave them at a much earlier age, and leave them, too, able, of themselves, to acquire any further knowledge, they might need, and to qualify themselves for any station in society, they might be called to fill. In Prussia, the youth are expected to quit the Common Schools at fourteen. They are not, however, released from the obligation to attend them, unless they have satisfied the supervisors, that they have acquired the elements of a good education. The examination to which they are subjected is not a sham. And, let me tell you, we should blush at the comparison between what is actually required there, and what is pretended to be taught in our schools. There is no doubt, in my mind, that children might easily be made to know more at fourteen than they now do, generally, at twenty ; and be much better able and disposed to pursue their own improvement.

If the prevention of poverty and crime be more practicable and more merciful than the cure of those evils, then should the good education of the whole people be the object of paramount regard, with all patriots and philanthropists. The happiest omen of our day is, the revival of the public interest in our Common Schools. This interest is manifest in the erection of, here and there, a schoolhouse of more ample dimensions and more convenient appurtenances ; in the preparation of books more rational and intelligible than those which have been heretofore in use, and the provision of some apparatus, by which the natural sciences may be illustrated. But all these things, fellow-citizens, will be of little avail, if we do no more. The houses may be perfectly commodious, the books may be the best that the wisdom of man can devise, and the children may be supplied with maps, and

globe, and orgeries, &c. &c. ; but all these things will profit them little, unless they are committed to the guidance of competent teachers ; of those who understand the nature of the young mind and heart, and the processes by which they may be unfolded. The teacher is the *soul* of the school. If he have life, light, and love, his pupils will be animated, intelligent, and affectionate.

My friends, the office of school teacher is the highest in the gift of the people. Upon the faithful and wise discharge of its duties, more than upon any other, depends the wellbeing of every community. It is second only in importance to the God-conferred office of parents. School teachers are indeed the delegates of parents. I am aware that there are many, who sustain the holy relation of fathers and mothers, who seem not conscious of the high trust reposed in them. We can hardly expect such persons to be deeply interested in the choice of teachers, or in any plan for the improvement of schools. But to those of you, who feel as parents should, I speak in the assurance of being believed, when I say, that it may do your children an incalculable injury, to place them in the hands of any but such as are well qualified for the charge, by their competent knowledge, discriminating judgment, aptness to teach, good temper, and, more than all, their pure moral principles, and unfeigned piety.

“ Oh, woe for those, who trample on the mind,  
That deathless thing ! They know not what they do,  
Nor what they deal with ! Man, perchance, may bind  
The flower his step hath bruised ; or light anew  
The torch he quenches ; or to music wind  
Again the lyre-string from his touch that flew.  
But for the soul ! Oh ! tremble and beware  
To lay rude hands upon God’s mysteries *there !*”

No doubt, many a budding intellect has been nipped, and the best affections of many a young heart have been crushed out, by the rude hands of teachers, who knew nothing of the mysteries of the human soul ; who have gone to work upon children, as if they were blocks of wood or marble, to be hewn or chiselled into the desired form. The nature of the work they have undertaken has been wholly misapprehended, by many who have assumed the responsibilities of teachers. Education means not so much the putting of any thing into the mind and heart, as the drawing out, the unfolding, the educating, of what is in the human soul. The etymology of the word shows what its prime signification is. The mind of a child is not, as some seem to suppose, a bag, into which you may throw words or ideas, as a boy would his marbles. No. It is an instrument, most delicate, strung by the Father of spirits, and placed in the human frame, to be played on by that invisible being, whom we call *self*. The high purpose of education is not to teach a child to repeat the thoughts of others, but to lead him to think for himself. It is not to compel him to submit to the dictation of other minds, but to induce him to follow the conscientious convictions of his own,—to judge even of himself what is right, and to abide by that decision, as one who must give an account to the Author of his being. It can do the mind of a child no good, to require him to say that any thing is true, until he has been brought to perceive that it is true. It can do his heart no good, to obey any precept, before he has been led to perceive that that precept is right, in accordance with the will of the Heavenly Father, the law written by the finger of God, on every heart. A child should not be taught to say, even that two and two make four ; but rather assisted, in the exercise of his own faculties, to discover this simple truth.

Mr. Lewis, the Superintendent of Common Schools in Ohio, has said, in a late Report to the Legislature of that State, “ to compel obedience to any law, against a youth’s sense of justice, is but laying the foundation of future discontent with all government.” This is a remark worthy of serious con-

sideration. Children, no less than adult men, should be governed,—indeed they can be perfectly governed,—only by the power of inward principle, not by the fear of outward penalty. If we would have them, when grown up, resolute to maintain the right and withstand the wrong, at any expense of corporal suffering or temporal loss, we must be careful not to break that noble spirit, by compelling them to act in violation of their convictions of right. No firm, enduring basis of character is laid, until a youth has become able to govern himself; until he has come to do right and avoid wrong, from choice. It is especially important, that the principle, I have hinted at, should be reverently regarded by school teachers. Incomparably more of good or ill depends upon the *moral discipline* at our primary schools, than upon the instruction that may be given in the elementary branches of learning. We are trying in this country a momentous experiment. Our Republic stands before the world, on the right of the people to govern themselves. Doubtless, they have that right. Doubtless, they are able to govern themselves. But the ability to do so resides in the bosoms of the people, as individuals, and not in their corporate capacity. It is a high absurdity to suppose, that the people, in their body politic, can govern themselves, if they are unable to do so individually. Within the last five years, we have had too much evidence, that our civil arm is weak. Many begin to doubt, whether there is virtue enough in our community to sustain itself. If our great experiment fails, it will be for the want of moral principle. And the experiment will fail, if far greater pains be not taken to train up our youth in the art of self-government. This must be done in the family, and at school. I wish that some far abler hand than mine would set forth this view of our system of public instruction. At present, it seems to be very inefficient to the purpose I have indicated. In our schools, our children are first brought into connection and collision with their fellows. Yet, how little is done there, to impress them with a due respect for one another's rights and feelings! How little, to cultivate their social virtues! Nay, worse, as I have already intimated, much is done to deprave them. Constant appeals are made to the spirit of emulation. They are set up as rivals of each other. To stimulate them to mental activity, the fire of hell, it may be, is kindled in their hearts. And they come at length into the arena of life, not aiming at excellence, for its own sake, but thirsting for distinction; unless, indeed, they fall into that large class, in whose bosoms the hope of improvement has never been awakened, who are content to live for what they can eat, drink, and wear. The moral discipline of our schools is, I apprehend, more deficient even than the method of teaching the sciences. A radical change, in this respect, is indispensable. For this, if for no other part of their office, it is obvious that we need a race of teachers much better qualified than the present. Until such are provided, our system of Public Instruction will continue to be wholly inadequate to our wants, if no worse.

To meet this imperious demand, the Massachusetts Board of Education have proposed the establishment of schools, for the specific purpose of training those who wish to be instructors, in the arts of teaching and of moral discipline. Normal schools, for so they are called, have been in operation in some parts of Europe, for more than fifty years. Their efficacy is unquestionable.

In closing, let me exhort you to admit into your improved Schoolhouse none but the best teachers that can be obtained. I can assure you, there is no economy so poor as the employment of an incompetent teacher. Let your resolution ever be, not that you will have one at this or that price, be he what he may; but that you will have a good one, cost what he may.